Rethinking Japan's Earliest Written Narratives: Early-Heian *Kundokugo* Translations of Chinese Buddhist Texts

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1 Introduction

The earliest examples of fully-formed written Japanese come from the poetry and imperial edicts of the Nara period (710–794 C.E.). However, examples of extended narrative prose do not appear until the Heian period (794–1185 C.E.). While *Taketori Monogatari* (竹取物語 *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*) is often cited as the earliest Japanese narrative, even the oldest estimates of its origin place it in the latter half of the ninth century. Thus *Taketori Monogatari* was predated by early-ninth-century Japanese translations of Buddhist sutras that include full narratives in the form of parables and didactic tales of past reincarnations of the Buddha.

These tales were read in *kundokugo* (訓読語), the linguistic variety that arose from transposing and reciting Chinese texts in Japanese, which is as old as the act of reading itself in Japan. The religious and political classes who learned, copied, and propagated Buddhist sutras during the Heian period used *kundokugo* when reciting them in Japanese. In the Nara period, Emperor Shōmu created a network of Kokubunji temples and ordered monks throughout the country to copy and recite the *Golden Light Sutra* (金光明最勝王経 *Konkōmyō Saishō Ōkyō*) in order for the imperial household and the realm to gain divine protection. The *Golden Light Sutra*, like most Buddhist sutras, is structured as an account of one who witnessed the Buddha addressing and conversing with a host of assembled deities. Although these sutras originated in India, they came to Japan via China, and therefore Chinese carried an air of religious authenticity. However, in translating these texts into vernacular Japanese, the monks had to read between the lines, both figuratively and literally: figuratively, because Chinese lacks the morphological complexities of Japanese, so the translators had to add particles to nouns and grammatical markers to verbs and adjectives; literally, because in order to preserve their translations in writing they used diacritic

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markings between, and occasionally on, the original Chinese characters to denote the appropriate Japanese affixes. Temples had their own traditions of interpretation and translation, which lead to variation among translations.

This paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 introduces *kundokugo* and its orthography. Section 3 describes how this study is informed by and builds upon previous *kundokugo* research. Then, section 4 presents a *kundokugo* rendition of the *Golden Light Sutra*'s tale of Jalavāhana (流水 *Rusui*),[1] arguing that it is one of the earliest narratives depicted in Japanese. Section 5 discusses the rhetorical role of early Japanese grammar in presenting the tale before comparing its narrative framework with that of the earliest secular Japanese narrative, *Taketori Monogatari*. Section 6 concludes the paper by discussing the role of *kundokugo* in presenting Buddhist narratives to a Japanese audience at a time when direct comprehension of the Chinese source texts was in decline even among the educated elite.

2 *Kundokugo* and its Orthography

This section introduces the variety of early Japanese used to read Chinese Buddhist texts, *kundokugo*, and presents examples of its orthography and grammar.

2.1 Methods of Reading *Kundokugo*

Kundokugo is a register of early spoken Japanese adapted for reading texts written in Sinitic script aloud as Japanese or quoting Sinitic texts in Japanese. This paper follows Brian Steininger in using the term Sinitic script to refer to writing using only sinographs, or Chinese characters—*kanji* in modern Japanese and *hanzi* in modern Mandarin Chinese.[2] Texts written using Chinese characters may be referred to as Sinitic texts regardless of their origin. The term *kundokugo* comes from the expression *kanbun-kundoku* (漢文訓読 Sinitic writing – Japanese reading), and is sometimes referred to as *kanbun-kundokugo* (漢文訓読語 Sinitic writing – Japanese reading language).

As this research focuses more on the language itself rather than on the orthography of the

1 Romanized names of Buddhist figures come from R. E. Emmerick, *The Sūtra of Golden Light: Being a Translation of the* Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra, Luzac & Company Ltd., 1970.
2 Brian Steininger, *Chinese Literary Forms in Heian Japan: Poetic and Practice*, Harvard University Asia Center, 2017.

source texts, it follows Kobayashi Yoshinori in calling this variety of Early Modern Japanese *kundokugo*.[3] Furthermore, many inquiries into *kundokugo* examine the glossing system used to add Japanese morphemes to Sinitic texts. These glosses are called *kunten* (訓点 reading glosses) and the written language is thus often called *kuntengo* (訓点語 reading gloss language). Many studies of Sinitic texts rendered in Japanese focus on these markings, and use the term *kuntengo* throughout.[4] *Kundokugo* and *kuntengo* are thus terms for the same language, with the former focusing on the spoken language and the later on the written.[5]

The following figure represents the most common scheme of glossing Sinitic texts in Japan. However, this only represents one of over two hundred glossing schemes used in Japan during the Heian period.[6]

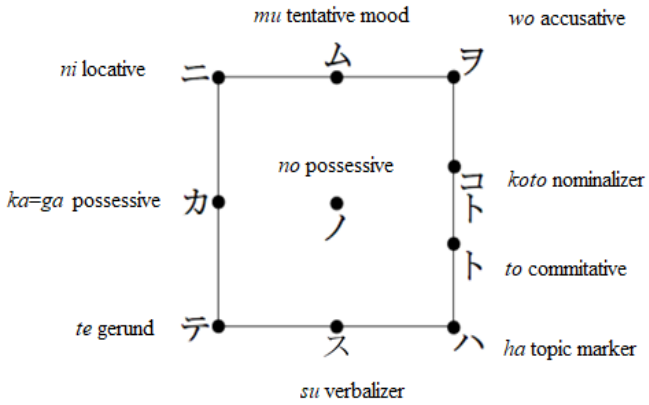


Figure 1: Heian Period *Kunten* Glossing Scheme (Adapted from Alberizzi 2014[7])

3 Kobayashi Yoshinori 小林芳規, *Heian Jidai no Bussho ni Motozuku Kanbun Kundoku-shi no Kenkyū 1: Jojutsu no Hōhō* 平安時代の仏書に基づく漢文訓読史の研究(1) 叙述の方法, Kyūko Shoin 汲古書院, 2011.

4 For example, Ōtsubo Heiji 大坪併治, *Kuntengo no Kenkyū* 訓点語の研究, Kazama Shobō 風間書房, 1961.

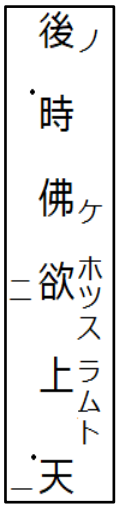
5 This distinction is also made in Kobayashi (op. cit., p. 4). See John Whitman, Miyoung Oh, Jinho Park, Valerio Luigi Alberizzi, Masayuki Tsukimoto, Teiji Kosukegawa, and Tomokazu Takada, "Toward an International Vocabulary for Research on Vernacular Readings of Chinese Texts," *Scripta*, vol. 2, 2010, pp. 1–22 for more on English translations of technical terminology regarding *kundokugo* and its source texts. Also, to many researchers, *kundokugo* and *kuntengo* more specifically refer to the lexical items found in these texts, and *kundokubun* more accurately refers to the linguistic style (Kinsui Satoshi 金水敏, personal communication).

6 Valerio Luigi Alberizzi, "An Introduction to Kunten Glossed Texts and Their Study in Japan," *Dossiers d'Histoire Epistémologie Langage*, vol. 7, 2014, pp. 1–9.

7 Ibid., p. 6.

Note that although this figure displays a system of dots around the *kanji*, other readings are indicated by slanted, vertical, or bent lines in the same locations. These markings are often called *okototen* (ヲコト点) due to the dot at the upper right corner of the *kanji* representing the accusative marker *o* and the dot on the right-side representing the nominalizer *koto*. While the term *okototen* refers specifically to this system of glossing, *kunten* includes both these and other reading marks, such as *furigana*.

Beginning in the Heian period, *kunten*-marked texts were also accompanied by *kana*, the precursors to modern *furigana* reading glosses and *okurigana*. Bjarke Frellesvig's *A History of the Japanese Language* presents an accurate and succinct account of how Sinitic texts were read as Japanese in the form of *kundokugo*.[8] Frellesvig presents the following example (adapted slightly for this paper) to describe the reading method and his romanization scheme:



> We have noted in CAPITALS readings not indicated in the *kunten* text [...] Everything in lower case [...] is directly represented in the *kunten* text. We use **boldface** for glosses giving grammatical information not represented in the Chinese text, and ***bold italics*** for such information given by *okoto-ten*, and we underline words which have been transposed, generally by a move to the right as instructed by numbers, but note also that the order of 欲 and 上 has been reversed without any overt instruction. Knowing and following the conventions used in this tradition of *kanbun-kundoku* allows a reader to render the Chinese text into Japanese [...]
>
後	時	佛		
NOTI **no**	TOKI ***ni***	POTOke,		
after COP.ADN	time DAT	Buddha		
天	上			欲
AME ***ni***	NOBOra-**mu**		**to**	possu
heaven DAT	ascend-CONJ.	CONCL	COMP	want.CONCL
>
> "Later, the Buddha wanted to ascend to heaven."[9]

The *okototen* gloss representing *ni*, which is often taken to be locative but Frellesvig interprets

8 Bjarke Frellesvig, *A History of the Japanese Language*, Cambridge University Press, 2010.
9 Ibid., pp. 261–262. *Kunten*-marked text adapted from p. 261.

as dative, marks the upper left corner of *toki* and *ame*. This represents the glossing scheme adapted from Alberizzi above.[10] Furthermore, Frellesvig's romanization of today's *ha-gyō* (ハ行, "mora beginning with /h/") as *pa-gyō* represents the general consensus among historical linguists regarding the phonology of early Japanese. However, as the focus of this paper is on *kundokugo* morphology rather than phonetics, examples will be presented using the phonology of today's Japanese to facilitate comprehension.

2.2 Grammatical Features of *Kundokugo*

As noted above, *kundokugo* should be understood as a variety of early Japanese. Although many of its grammatical features at the beginning of the Heian period reflect those of Old Japanese, the language found in Nara-period texts, it should be viewed as a register of Early Middle Japanese, the language of the Heian period. However, Jennifer Guest writes that "the formation of semi-standardized tropes of equivalence (or calques) between written characters and Japanese words helped to shape *kundoku* renderings as a distinctive style [...] that was not expected to conform exactly to any other style of classical Japanese."[11] Steininger has recently described the process thus:

> Rather than providing a naturalistic translation, *kundoku* cleaves closely to the original text. The sentence produced does not aim for an idiomatic construction according to colloquial speech patterns, but represents the meaning through a limited, formalized Japanese register while maintaining the structure of the original as much as possible.[12]

Both Guest and Steininger focus their discussions on the act of reading Sinitic texts aloud as Japanese, *kundoku*, rather than the language produced in the act, *kundokugo*. In contrast, the focus of this paper is on the linguistic register itself, which has been a vigorous subject of research in the field of traditional Japanese linguistics (国語学 *kokugogaku*) for over a century.

10 Alberizzi, op. cit.
11 Jennifer Guest, *Primers, Commentaries, and Kanbun Literacy in Japanese Literary Culture, 950–1250 C.E.*, Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 2013, pp. 25–26.
12 Steininger, op. cit., p. 143.

3 History of *Kundokugo* Research

Since the research of Ōya Tōru (大矢透, 1851–1928) and Yoshizawa Yoshinori (吉澤義則, 1876–1954), scholars have recognized the importance of Sinitic texts marked with Japanese reading glosses in understanding the history of the Japanese language. Ōya was the first scholar to examine *kunten* texts as a source of data for Japanese language research in his search for the origins and history of the *kana* syllabaries,[13] and Yoshizawa is credited as the first scholar to analyze *okototen* glosses for their grammatical significance in rendering Sinitic texts in Japanese.[14] Ōya and Yoshizawa subsequently built upon each other's research to establish the documentation and analysis of *kundokugo* as a sub-discipline of Japanese linguistics by producing numerous works and by influencing generations of scholars including Kasuga Masaji (春日政治, 1878–1962), Nakada Norio (中田祝夫, 1915–2010), and Ōtsubo Heiji (大坪併治, 1915–2019) to take up the lexical, grammatical, phonological, and orthographical analysis of *kunten* texts.[15]

Kasuga's work documenting a complete *Golden Light Sutra* glossed at Saidaiji temple in the early Heian period[16] remains the standard for *kundokugo* linguistic analysis and the rendering of *kunten*-marked Sinitic texts in more readable Japanese orthography. All quotations of the sutra in the remainder of this paper are quoted from his monograph. Kasuga also was the first scholar to note the use of past tense marking at only the beginning and conclusion of the sutra. Nakada expanded the diachronic scope of *kundokugo* research, which had been focused on the early Heian period, by examining texts throughout the Heian and Kamakura periods.[17] By comparing texts across genres and generations, he found patterns in *okototen* marking and determined that the *okototen* schema displayed in section 2 was both one of the earliest and most common patterns of the grammatical glossing of Sinitic texts in Japan. Ōtsubo is recognized for his in-depth analyses

13 Ōya Tōru 大矢透, *Kana Zukai oyobi Kana Jitai Enkaku Shiryō* 仮名遣及仮名字体沿革史料, Kokutei Kyōkasho Kyōdō Hanbaisho 国定教科書共同販売所, 1909.

14 Yoshizawa Yoshinori 吉澤義則, *Iwasaki Bunkosho-zō Shōsho oyobi Nihon Shoki Koshōbon ni Kuwaeraretaru Okototen ni tsukite* 岩崎文庫所蔵尚書及び日本書紀古鈔本に加へられたる乎古止点に就きて, Iwasaki Bunko 岩崎文庫, 1919.

15 Tsukishima Hiroshi 築島裕, "Kunten Gogaku Kenkyū-shi" 訓点語学研究史, in Yoshida Kanehiko, Ishizuka Harumichi, Tsukishima Hiroshi, and Tsukimoto Masayuki eds. 吉田金彦・石塚晴通・築島裕・月本雅幸編, *Kuntengo Jiten* 訓点語辞典, Tōkyōdō Shuppan 東京堂出版, 2001, pp. 4–21.

16 Kasuga Masaji, 春日政治, *Saidaiji-bon Konkōmyō Saishō Ōkyō Koten no Kokugogaku-teki Kenkyū* 西大寺本金光明最勝王経古点の国語学的研究, Benseisha 勉誠社, 1985 (1942).

17 Nakada Norio 中田祝夫, *Kunbon no Kokugogakuteki Kenkyū Sōron-hen* 点本の国語学的研究総論篇, Benseisha 勉誠社, 1954.

of Heian period *kundokugo* grammar, and published what may have been the first article on the relation between grammar and narrative structure in *kundokugo* texts.[18] He noted that throughout the Heian period, Buddhist *kundokugo* narration begins with past tense marking, but shifts to plain and aspectual forms before concluding narratives in the past tense. On the other hand, he found secular, or Confucian, Sinitic texts to lack grammatical past tense marking even when depicting historical events. While Ōtsubo recognized the use of historical present, a well-known narrative technique discussed in section 5 below, he does not explain its use throughout Buddhist *kundokugo* texts.

Matsumoto Mitsutaka (松本光隆, 1955–) is the first scholar to examine the shifting narrative perspectives of these texts.[19] He proposes the following multi-layered formation of Buddhist narrative:

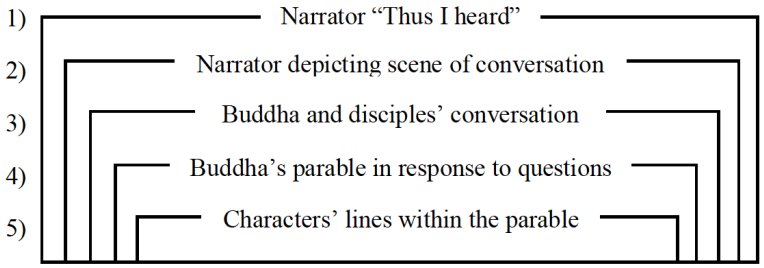


Figure 2: Framing in Buddhist Narratives[20]

The outermost layer of most sutras contains only the first line, "Thus I heard." Of the entire sutra, this is the only line conveying the direct experience of the narrator. In other words, every subsequent line of the sutra is hearsay. The second layer consists of the narrator describing the scene in which the Buddha has conversations regarding the dharma with the members of a gathered assembly. The conversation itself is the third layer. However, often in these didactic conversations the Buddha becomes the narrator of parables. This narration by the Buddha comprises the fourth layer. Finally, the characters in the tales themselves talk of past events in their conversations, and

18 Ōtsubo Heiji 大坪併治, "Setsuwa no Jojutsu Keishiki toshite Mita Jodōshi ki, keri: Kunten Shiryō o Chūshin ni" 説話の叙述形式として見た助動詞キ・ケリ—訓点資料を中心に—, *Kokugogaku* 国語学, vol. 111, 1977, pp. 25–38.

19 Matsumoto Mitsutaka 松本光隆, "Ishiyama-dera-zō Bussetsu Taishi Shudanakyō Heian Chūkiten ni Okeru Kundokugo no Buntai" 石山寺蔵仏説太子須陀拏経平安中期点における訓読語の文体, *Kuntengo to Kunten Shiryō* 訓点語と訓点資料, vol. 127, 2011, pp. 210–222.

20 Adapted from Matsumoto, p. 215.

these form the fifth layer in Matsumoto's depiction of the narrative frames that form Buddhist *kundokugo* texts. Matsumoto recognizes the need for a narrative analysis of these texts, but primarily focuses on the differences in the grammar and lexicon between narration and quotations. Building upon Ōtsubo and Matsumoto's narrative analyses, this study examines how sentence-level grammatical choices reflect the broader narrative style in Buddhist *kundokugo* narratives. This is a fertile means by which to understand the nature of the narrative stance of both the primary narrator and the characters sharing parables within each text.

Western linguists still generally investigate *kundokugo* through an exclusively comparative lens; they have contrasted the heavily borrowed Chinese lexicon and conservative language with the well-known fictional works and diaries of the Heian period, giving attention to *kundokugo*'s role in the history of the Japanese language, but ignoring the facets of its narrative structure.[21] From a literary perspective, investigations of Japanese narrative have included nuanced examinations of the pragmatic use of grammatical marking in Heian-period texts,[22] and the discipline of narrative study uniquely lends itself to analyzing the overlapping framing strategies of a narrator quoting the Buddha quoting others in his parables.

4 *Golden Light Sutra*'s Tale of Jalavāhana

After touching upon the history of the *Golden Light Sutra* in Japan, this section depicts the longest embedded parable in the text, the tale of Jalavāhana, through which this paper will examine the rhetorical role of grammar in early Japanese narrative.

4.1 The *Golden Light Sutra* in Early Japan

As noted earlier, during the Nara period Emperor Shōmu created a network of temples called Kokubunji to project centralized authority and ordered monks throughout the country to copy and recite the *Golden Light Sutra* in order to protect the state. Although most Buddhist sutras originated

21 Frellesvig, op. cit. and Valerio Luigi Alberizzi, "The Role of *Kunten* Materials in the Process of Sino-Japanese Hybridization," *Quaderni di Linguistica e Studi Orientali / Working Papers in Linguistics and Oriental Studies*, vol. 1, 2015, pp. 233–258.

22 Chiyuki Kumakura, *The Narrative Time of* Genji Monogatari, Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1980, Amanda M. Stinchecum, *Narrative Voice in* The Tale of Genji, University of Illinois Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies, 1985, and Richard Okada, *Figures of Resistance: Language, Poetry and Narrating in* The Tale of Genji *and other Mid-Heian Texts*, Duke University Press, 1991.

from a Pali oral tradition, the *Golden Light Sutra* was first translated into Chinese from Sanskrit by Dharmakṣema in the early fifth century. However, as this translation was incomplete, it was translated again from Sanskrit by Yijing in 703 C.E. The new version quickly made its way to Japan and was distributed and copied throughout the country.

4.2 The Tale of Jalavāhana

The tale of Jalavāhana, which depicts the origin of the ten thousand divine sons (天子 *tenshi*), is the longest embedded narrative in the *Golden Light Sutra*, spanning the 24th and 25th chapters. These chapters primarily consist of the Buddha conveying the tale to the Bodhisattva Samuccayā, the Goddess of the Bodhi Tree (菩提樹神 *Bodai Jushin*). The tale progresses as follows, with the tensing consistent with the *kundokugo* text:

Part I: Long ago, there was a kingdom where the populace was afflicted by various diseases. There was a great doctor, Jaṭiṃdhara, who had a son named Jalavāhana. Jalavāhana knew his father was too old to travel the land and save the people, so he asked Jaṭiṃdhara to teach him. Jalavāhana becomes a great doctor and travels the kingdom healing the sick.

Part II: Jalavāhana had two sons who grew up to be honorable men. They travel together through some woods and happen upon a drying lake filled with ten thousand fish approaching death. As Jalavāhana feels great sorrow for these creatures, a tree goddess appears asking him to save them. He asks the king for elephants to carry water to the lake, and the king accepts the request. Once he saves the fish, he teaches them the dharma.

Part III: The ten thousand fish pass away and are reborn as divine sons. They realize Jalavāhana teaching them the dharma led to their wondrous rebirth, and, with great joy, light up the sky and rain countless flowers upon a sleeping Jalavāhana. The next morning, the king asks his ministers why the sky was alight, and they suggest asking Jalavāhana. The king summons him and Jalavāhana assumes the fish have died and been reborn as heavenly beings. To confirm this, the king sends a minister along with Jalavāhana's sons to inspect the lake, and they find the fish had indeed passed away. The king rejoiced upon hearing the news of this glorious rebirth.

The Buddha concludes the tale by informing Samuccayā that he was Jalavāhana in a past life, she was the king in a past life, and the other characters in the story were also past lives of Buddhist deities and bodhisattvas.

The Saidaiji *Golden Light Sutra* had *kunten* added to it around 830 C.E.,[23] thus predating the *belles-lettres* of the Heian period. In other words, the tale of Jalavāhana, although a translation, is among the oldest narratives written in Japanese. The following section investigates how the early Japanese grammatical marking of time was employed to create structure throughout the narrative.

5 Rhetorical Role of Grammar in *Kundokugo* Narration

In the above depiction of the tale of Jalavāhana, we find a technique in English narration known as tense switching. That is, the story shifted from the past tense to the present tense:

> [...] there **was** a kingdom [...] There **was** a great doctor, Jaṭiṃdhara, who **had** a son named Jalavāhana. Jalavāhana **knew** his father was too old to travel the land and save the people, so he **asked** Jaṭiṃdhara to teach him. Jalavāhana **becomes** a great doctor [...]
>
> **Example 1: Tense Switching in the Beginning of the Tale of Jalavāhana, part I**

This present tense framed in the past is known as historical present, and the narrative effect of this tense switching—drawing the listener in and making the story feel more immediate—is a reflection of the rhetorical role of grammar in narration. Furthermore, regarding time reference and narrative discourse, Suzanne Fleischman writes:

> In narrative discourse, time reference is normally established at the outset of the text, and since it tends to be a property of large stretches of discourse, or even of entire texts, it need not in principle be reiterated in each successive clause. [...] One result is that in the narrative grammars of many languages tense is in large measure freed from its primary referential function of locating events in time, and the available morphology is pressed into service for other, notably pragmatic, purposes.[24]

As noted in section 3, Kasuga, Ōtsubo, and Matsumoto have recognized the establishment of past

23 Okimori Takuya 沖森卓也, "Konkōmyō Saishō Ōkyō" 金光明最勝王経, in Yoshida et. al., op cit., pp. 134–135.

24 Suzanne Fleischman, "Verb Tense and Point of View in Narrative," in Suzanne Fleischman and Linda R. Waugh, eds., *Discourse-pragmatics and the Verb: The Evidence from Romance*, Routledge, 1991, pp. 26–54; this passage appears on p. 28.

time reference in Buddhist *kundokugo* texts. However, they do not examine the pragmatic purposes of the grammatical expressions of time that Fleichman observes.

This section discusses how these grammatical expressions create distance and perspective in narration. Examples of how this is done in today's English and Japanese are presented before returning to the sutra's tale to discuss grammar's rhetorical role in *kundokugo* narration.

5.1 English Tense and Aspect

The chart below is a basic summary of the grammatical marking of time in English. The two grammatical categories involved with temporality are aspect and tense. In Östen Dahl's authoritative monograph on the subject *Tense and Aspect Systems* he writes, "Aspect [...] has to do with the structure of the things going on or taking place in the situation described by the sentence [...] tenses are typically deictic categories, in that they relate time points to the moment of speech. Aspects, on the other hand, are non-deictic categories."[25] The following chart, which uses pedagogical rather than linguistic terminology, depicts the tenses and aspects involved in English narration. Although narrative sequences regarding future events are possible, they will not be included in this discussion due to their rarity.

Aspect→ Tense↓	Simple	Progressive	Perfect	Perfect Progressive
Present	I walk	I am walking	I have walked	I have been walking
Past	I walked	I was walking	I had walked	I had been walking

Chart 1: Grammatical Marking of Tense and Aspect in English

The morphological marking of aspect in English can be broken down into the categories of simple,

25 Östen Dahl, *Tense and Aspect Systems*, Blackwell Publishers, 1985, pp. 24–25.

progressive, perfect, and perfect progressive. Here "simple" and "present" can also mean "unmarked". The following example, broken down by clause, demonstrates the narrative use of tense and aspect in English:

1. So the other night I was jogging through Central Park.
2. It was about 8 o'clock
3. when suddenly I see this glowing light in the sky.
4. Now I have been jogging there for years
5. and I have never seen anything like it.
6. So I take out my cell phone
7. to take a picture,
8. but before I can take a shot,
9. it disappeared without a trace.

Example 2: English Narrative

We find past tense marking lines 1, 2, and 9, framing the intervening lines, unmarked for tense, in the past. Progressive aspect is found in "was jogging" of line 1, giving background information to orient the narrative. The perfect "have never seen" of line 5 and perfect progressive "have been jogging" of line 4 present relevant facts to highlight the newsworthiness of the phenomenon in line 3, which is unmarked for tense or aspect. Thus, in English past tense may be used rhetorically to frame the discourse in the past and progressive, perfect, and perfect progressive aspects are often used to present background information. These grammatical forms serve to foreground, or highlight, narrative events unmarked for aspect and tense.

5.2 Modern Japanese Tense and Aspect

Tense and aspect play different rhetorical roles in Japanese and English. Here is a chart of the grammatical marking of time in Modern Japanese:

Aspect→ Tense↓	Simple	Progressive/ Resultative
Present	歩く *aruku* 帰る *kaeru*	歩いている *aruiteiru* 帰っている *kaetteiru*
Past	歩いた *aruita* 帰った *kaetta*	歩いていた *aruiteita* 帰っていた *kaetteita*

Chart 2: Grammatical Marking of Tense and Aspect in Modern Japanese

The line marked "present" in chart 2 is often referred to as "non-past" due to the use of these forms to depict future events and states as well. However, for the purposes of this discussion "present" will be used. Regarding aspect, Japanese verbs that depict an ongoing event, like *aruku* ("walk"), become progressive in their *-teiru* form (*aruiteiru* "is walking"). Conversely, verbs that depict a change of state, such as *kaeru* ("return home"), are resultative in their *-teiru* form (*kaetteiru* "has returned home").

Furthermore, the notion of tense marking in Modern Japanese is a controversial one. Although the morpheme *-ta* is often referred to as "past tense," it can often more accurately be described aspectually as a perfective marking a complete event or state. In narration, for example, Hiroshi Nara has found clauses both *-ta*-marked and non-*ta*-marked regardless of time reference.[26] Instead, he concludes that *-ta*-marked clauses are most likely to be events that progress the narrative. In other words, *-ta* can be used to foreground events in Modern Japanese narration. Although Nara does not discuss its narrative function, the *-teiru* form, regardless of being progressive or resultative, depicts background information, paralleling the uses seen in the English progressive and perfect forms.

26 Hiroshi Nara, "Aspect and Discourse in Tense-Switching: A Case Study of Natsume Sōseki's *Botchan*," *Japanese Language and Literature*, vol. 45, 2011, pp. 273–305.

5.3 *Kundokugo* Tense and Aspect

Here is a chart of the grammatical marking of time in *kundokugo*.

Aspect→ Tense↓	Simple	Perfective	Resultative
Present	なる *naru* 得 *u*	なりぬ *narinu* 得つ *etsu*	なれり *nareri* 得たり *etari*
Past	なりき *nariki* 得き *eki*	なりにき *nariniki* 得てき *eteki*	なれりき *nareriki* 得たりき *etariki*

Chart 3: Grammatical Marking of Tense and Aspect in *Kundokugo*

It is clear that there are more options than we find in Modern Japanese. There are two perfective morphemes, *-nu* and *-tsu*, which depict changes of state. Discussing the difference between them is beyond the scope of this paper, but *-nu* generally governs intransitive verbs and *-tsu*, transitive ones. There are also two resultative morphemes, *-(a)ri*[27] and *-tari*. These have more semantic overlap than *-nu* and *-tsu* and generally only differ in the morphological paradigm of verbs they can govern. *-ki* is often described as the "past tense" morpheme of *kundokugo*,[28] and, with regard to narration, is a productive definition in the following discussion. However, *-ki* is often defined by its modal and evidential qualities as well, and these will be touched upon in section 5.5 below.[29] In order to examine how tense and aspectual marking are employed in *kundokugo* narratives, I will next describe their usage in the tale of Jalavāhana.

27 This morpheme is often referred to in the Japanese literature by its surface form, *-ri*, and is even described so in high school grammar textbooks. However, all these morphemes govern the predicate's infinitive form (連用形 *renyōkei*), and *-(a)ri* only follows verbs whose infinitive form ends in /i/ such as *itari*, which results in crasis between the final /i/ and subsequent /a/, leading to the following surface form: *itari-ari* > *itareri*.

28 Kasuga, op. cit., and Ōtsubo 1977, op. cit.

29 See Suzuki Tai 鈴木泰, *Kodai Nihongo Jikan Hyōgen no Keitairon-teki Kenkyū* 古代日本語時間表現の形態論的研究, Hitsuji Shobō ひつじ書房, 2009, and Charles Quinn, *A Functional Grammar of Predication in Classical Japanese* (Volumes I–III), Doctoral dissertation, The University of Michigan, 1987, for more detailed discussions regarding the semantics of Early Middle Japanese tense and aspect morphemes.

5.4 *Kundokugo* Tense and Aspect

The following example displays the tense and aspectual marking of every sentence in the tale of Jalavāhana excluding embedded quotations, separated into the three parts described in section 4.2:

Part I: (a)ri-ki, ki, ki, ki, ki, ki, ki, ki, ki, ki, ki, ki, ki, ki, ki, ki, ki, (plain), nu, (plain), ki, nu, nu, ki, (plain), ni-ki, ki, ni-ki, ki, ki, (plain), ki, (a)ri-ki

Part II: ki, ki, ki, ki, nu, (plain), (plain), (plain), (plain), tsu, (plain), (plain), (plain), (plain), (plain), (plain), nu, (plain), (plain), tsu, (plain), (plain), (plain), (plain), (plain), (plain), (plain), ni-ki, (plain), (plain), (plain), (plain), (plain), nu, (plain), (plain), ni-ki, ki, ki, ki, (plain), ki, ni-ki

Part III: tsu, nu, ki, nu, tari, (a)ri, (plain), nu, ni-ki, (plain), (plain), ki, (plain), (plain), (plain), nu, (plain), (plain), (plain), (plain), ki

Example 3: Tense and Aspect Marking of Each Sentence in the Tale of Jalavāhana

Here, "(plain)" represents any sentence that does not end with one of the five tense and aspect morphemes. At first glance, it is clear the narrative is framed by *-ki* marked sentences. However, when we compare the parts, we find a preponderance of past tense *-ki* in the first part of the tale. The reason for this is twofold. First, part one is essentially the orientation of the parable. It not only grounds the narrative in the past tense, it also establishes Jalavāhana as a healer who cares for all living beings. Second, Buddhist *kundokugo* texts have a proclivity to ground the discourse at the beginning with *-ki* throughout the orientation, then taper its use until the conclusion. This is seen in the overarching sutra narrator's grammatical marking as well, with the first chapter of the sutra having the most *-ki* marking as it establishes the setting. That is to say, the past tense marker *-ki* behaves more like the English past tense rather than Modern Japanese *-ta*, as it frames the discourse in the past.

When we look at part I, we also see it is framed by *-(a)ri-ki*, past resultatives. Part I establishes Jalavāhana as the hero, and essentially acts as a prologue to parts II and III, which describe the origin of the ten thousand divine sons. Sentences marked by resultatives by definition do not depict events, they only display their results.

過去の無量不可思議阿僧企耶の劫に、爾時に佛有して（於）世に**出現（し）たまへリキ**。[30]

*Kako no muryō fukashigi asōkiya no kō ni, sono toki ni hotoke imashite yo ni **shutsugenshitamaheriki**.*

"Infinite unimaginable incalculable aeons ago a Buddha **had appeared** in the world."

Example 4: *-(a)ri-ki* in First Line of the Tale of Jalavāhana, part I

是（の）如ク稱歎すること城邑に**周遍せりキ**。[31]

*Ko no gotoku shōtansuru koto jōō ni **shūhenseriki**.*

"Thus [his] praise **had spread throughout** the city."

Example 5: *-(a)ri-ki* in Last Line of the Tale of Jalavāhana, part I

In other words, they give background information to the main, or foregrounded events. Part I, thus framed, can be seen as the background to the rest of the story.

This backgrounding function of resultatives is reflected in the use of the *-tari* and *-(a)ri* we find in part III:

時に長者子は高樓の上に在（り）て安隱にして（而）**睡（り）たり**。[32]

*Toki ni chōjashi wa kōrō no ue ni arite annon ni site **nemuritari**.*

"Then the merchant's son [Jalavāhana], being on top of a tower, **has** peacefully **fallen asleep**."

Example 6: *-tari* in the Tale of Jalavāhana, part III

曼陀羅花摩訶曼陀羅華を雨（り）て、積レルこと、（于）膝マでに**至せり**。[33]

*Mandarage makamandarage wo hurite, tsumoreru koto, hiza made ni **itaseri**.*

"Having rained down white and heavenly lotus flowers, the accumulation of which **has reached** [his] knees."

Example 7: *-(a)ri* in the Tale of Jalavāhana, part III

Example 6 lays out the scene before the divine sons rain flowers upon Jalavāhana. Example 7

30 Kasuga, op. cit., p. 174. Emphasis added here and in subsequent quotations.
31 Ibid., p. 178.
32 Ibid., p. 183.
33 Ibid.

describes the result of the flowers' accumulation.

Finally, in *kundokugo* we find the perfectives *-tsu* and *-nu* sharing the narrative function of Modern Japanese *-ta*, in that they both only mark events that progress the narrative and draw the listener into the action by foregrounding. They are sprinkled among the "(plain)" sentences unmarked for tense and aspect, which depict events as happening before our eyes. Perfectives contain this immediacy as well, but mark sudden changes—both scene shifts, marking verbs of movement such as *yogiru* ("go across") and character changes, marking verbs of attainment or transformation such as *naru* ("become"). The end of part II contains a past perfective, *ni-ki*, to ground the narrative in the past and describe Jalavāhana returning home after teaching the dharma to the fish:

> 尒時長者子流水と及其の二（り）の子とい、彼の池の魚の為に、水を施し食を施し、并（せ）て法を說キ已（り）て、俱共に家に**還（り）にキ**。[34]
> *So no toki chōjashi Rusui to oyobi so no futari no ko to i, ka no ike no uo no tame ni, mizu wo hodokoshi jiki wo hodokoshi, awasete hō wo tokiowarite, tomo ni ie ni* ***kaeriniki****.*
> "Then the merchant's son Jalavāhana and his two children, having given water, given food, and together finished preaching the dharma for the sake of the fish of that lake, together **returned** home."
> **Example 8: *-ni-ki* at the End of the Tale of Jalavāhana, part II**

The story continues with perfectives marking the tale's progression at the beginning of part III, which describes the reincarnation of the fish into divine sons:

> 是の長者子流水い、復（於）後の時に、聚會有（り）て衆の伎樂を設（け）たるに因（り）て、酒に醉（ひ）て（而）**臥（し）つ**。時に十千の魚同時に命過して三十三天に**生レヌ**。是（の）如キ念を**起（し）レク**、[(what they thought)] とオモフトキニ、便相ヒ謂（ひ）て曰（は）ク、[(what they said)]といひキ。[35]
> *Ko no chōjashi Rusui i, mata nochi no toki ni, jue arite moromoro no gigaku wo mōketaru ni yorite, sake ni yotte* ***fushitsu****. Toki ni jissen no uo dōji ni inochi sugoshite sanjūsanten ni* ***umarenu****. Ko no gotoki nen wo* ***okoshishiku****,* [(what they thought)] *to omō toki ni, sunawachi*

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.

ahiīte iwaku [(what they said)] *to* ***īki***.

"This merchant's son Jalavāhana, furthermore at a later time, due to having a gathering and having held a group masked performance [*gigaku*], became drunk on alcohol and **fell asleep**. Then the ten thousand fish passed away at the same time and **were [re]born** in heaven. Once they **gave rise to** the following thought, [(what they thought)], they then together **said** [(what they said)]."

Example 9: Beginning of the Tale of Jalavāhana, part III

We thus find Jalavāhana falling asleep after a party, marked by *-tsu*, and the rebirth of the divine sons, marked by *-nu*, before the discourse is grounded in the past with a *-ki* after a long quotation discussing the reason for their fortuitous rebirth.

5.5 *Kundokugo* Narration and Vernacular Heian-period Narration

A key difference between early-Heian sutras and vernacular Heian-period tales is epistemic grounding. Wheras the sutras are presented as historical texts, the *belles-lettres* of the period make no such claim. I turn to the earliest piece of Heian-period vernacular fiction as a point of comparison, *Taketori Monogatari*. Its narration shows features common to both *kundokugo* and vernacular literary Japanese. It begins thus:

今は昔、竹取の翁といふものあ**りけり**。野山にまじりて竹を取りつゝ、萬づの事に**使ひけり**。名をばさかきの造となむ**いひける**。その竹の中に、本光る竹なむ一筋あ**りける**。[36]

*Ima wa mukashi, taketori no okina to iu mono arik**eri**. Noyama ni majirite take wo toritsutsu, yorozu no koto ni **tsukaikeri**. Na wo ba Sakaki no Miyatsuko to namu **īkeru**. So no take no naka ni, moto hikaru take namu hitosuji **arikeri**.*

"(At a time) now past, there **was** a person called the old bamboo cutter. Going among the fields and mountains, he repeatedly collected bamboo and **used it to make** all kinds of things. His name, you know, **was** Sakaki no Miyatsuko. Among the bamboo, you know, **was** a stock

36 Inamura Tadashi 稲村徳, *Shinpan Kotenbun no Sōgō Kenkyū* 新版古典文の総合研究, Yūseido 有精堂, 1977, p. 16. Emphasis added.

of bamboo whose base was shining."

Example 10: Beginning of *Taketori Monogatari*

Although the narrative structure of *Taketori Monogatari* was likely influenced by *kundokugo*,[37] and later in the tale we find the narrative functions of the resultatives and perfectives reflecting those in the early-Heian *Golden Light Sutra*, the narrator of *Taketori Monogatari* clearly uses *-keri* to frame the tale rather than the past tense *-ki* found in the sutra. The tale of Jalavāhana begins thus:

過去の無量不可思議阿僧企耶の劫に、爾時に佛有して（於）世に**出現（し）たまへリキ**。名をば（曰）寶髻と**まをしキ**。如來應正遍知明行足善逝世間解無上士調御丈夫天人師佛世尊と**まをしキ**。[38]

*Kako no muryō fukashigi asōkiya no kō ni, so no toki ni hotoke imashite yo ni **shutsugenshitamaheriki**. Na wo ba Hōkei to **mōshiki**. Nyorai ō seihenji myōgyōsoku zensei, sekenge, mujōshi jōgojōbu tenninshi butsu seson to **mōshiki**.*

"Infinite unimaginable incalculable aeons ago a Buddha **had appeared** in the world. His name **was** Tathagata Ratnashikhin. He **was called** Tathagata, Arhat, perfect in enlightenment, perfect in knowledge and behaviour, well-travelled, knower of the world, the surpassed, supreme trainer, teacher of gods and men, Buddha, and Bhagavan."

Example 11: Beginning of the Tale of Jalavāhana

Although *-ki* is used to frame *kundokugo* texts, the use of *-keri* framing first seen in *Taketori Monogatari* is found throughout Heian-period vernacular narratives. The key difference here is the notion of fictionality. The rhetorical role of *-ki* is to ground the discourse in a real or experienced past. *-keri*, on the other hand, is used when there is no epistemic ground upon which to stand. It grounds the discourse as factual without direct evidence,[39] whereas *-ki* marks the discourse as historical truth.[40]

37 Haruo Shirane, *The Bridge of Dreams: A Poetics of the* Tale of Genji, Stanford University Press, 1987, p. 85.

38 Kasuga, op. cit., p. 174.

39 Charles Quinn, "Ōchō Sanbun no Gyōshūsei: Jisei to Asupekuto o Chūshin ni" 王朝散文の凝集性―時制とアスペクトを中心に―, *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Japanese Literature in Japan* 国際日本文学研究集会会議録, 1983, pp. 9–29.

40 John Bundschuh, "Evidence in Heian Buddhist Kundokugo Narration," in Dan O'Neill, ed., *Proceedings of the Association for Japanese Literary Studies*, vol. 20, forthcoming in 2020.

6 Conclusion

This paper has described the early Japanese register used for reading aloud and quoting Sinitic texts, or *kundokugo*. While research into *kundokugo* has been an important subfield of Japanese linguistics for the past century, there is still much work to do to explain how the translators of the source texts interpreted them for a society in which the use of literary Chinese was on the decline among the educated elite.[41] David Lurie argues that the essential nature of literacy in the Nara period and early Heian period was that of reading Sinitic texts as Japanese.[42] However, Steininger highlights the following quote from the *Tōzan Ōrai* (東山往来):

> Sutras in *on* reading contain many meanings. [...] Sutras in *kundoku* take one of those many meanings and put it into Yamato words. Because of this, the merit of sutras in *kundoku* is lessened. [...] *Kundoku* can be used to get the gist of the meaning, but for the perpetual attainment of merit use the original pronunciation.[43]

The term "original pronunciation" refers to *ondoku*, or Chinese readings, rather than Sanskrit or Pali, but the notion that the Chinese language is the proper reading of a text from China stands in stark contrast to much of both Steininger's and Lurie's arguments regarding literacy in early Japan. However, the emergence of *kunten* marking in the early Heian period to assist in the reading of these sutras in Japanese suggests that the monks who studied them could no longer bear the linguistic burden of translation without glossing.[44]

In order to captivate their audiences with the engaging narratives embedded within the sutras, like that of Jalavāhana, these monks employed the Japanese grammatical markers of time with maximum rhetorical force when rendering them in Japanese. The perfective aspect markers *-tsu* and *-nu* were used narratively to foreground scenes of transformation and movement, helping to highlight the story's progression. The narrative function of the resultative aspect markers *-(a)ri* and

41 Steininger, op. cit.
42 David B. Lurie, *Realms of Literacy: Early Japan and the History of Writing*, Harvard University Press, 2011.
43 Jōshin 定深, "Tōzan Ōrai" 東山往来, in Ishikawa Ken 石川謙, ed., *Nihon Kyōkasho Taikei: Ōrai-hen* 日本教科書大系往来編, Kōdansha 講談社, 1968, pp. 367–422. Cited and translated in Steininger, op. cit., p. 151.
44 Matthew Fraleigh, "Rearranging the Figures on the Tapestry: What Japanese Direct Translation of European Texts Can Tell Us About *Kanbun Kundoku*," *Japan Forum*, vol. 31, no.1, 2019, pp. 4–32.

-tari, on the other hand, was to lay out background information in order to establish the scene. Finally, the past-tense marker *-ki* was primarily employed to frame the discourse in the past, much like past tense in English narratives today. The use of these morphemes to foreground, background, and create frames in acts of translation at the onset of the Heian period led to the formation of fully formed narratives[45] within *kundokugo* renditions of Buddhist texts.

Although there are narrative passages in Nara-period texts such as the *Kojiki*, the *Kojiki* is an unglossed Sinitic text. While there is evidence that it followed Japanese syntax structure in certain clauses[46] and was likely read aloud as Japanese using *kanbun-kundoku*,[47] the way the narratives were structured via grammatical marking remains unclear. Buddhist texts fully marked by *kunten* glosses, however, provide the reader with the precise linguistic structures used when translating them into Japanese. While *Taketori Monogatari* may rightfully enjoy the status of the earliest tale written in vernacular writing, or *kana*, tales translated via *kunten* glosses at the onset of the Heian period should be recognized as the earliest examples of fully formed narratives written in Japanese.

45 In the Labovian sense, constituting abstracts, orientations, evaluations, complications, results, and codas. See chapter 9 of William Labov, *Language in the Inner City*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972.
46 Edith Aldridge, "*Hentai Kambun* Perspective on Short Scrambling," *Journal of East Asian Linguistics*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2001, pp. 169–200.
47 Lurie, op. cit.